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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 COLOMBO 001743

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS

NSC FOR E. MILLARD

LONDON FOR POL/RIEDEL

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINS](#) [EAID](#) [KPAO](#) [CE](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: Thailand talks conclude on positive note, with two sides agreeing to more meetings in coming months

Refs: (A) Ops Center-Colombo 09-18-02 telecon

- (B) Colombo 1739;
- (C) Bangkok 6597
- (D) Colombo 1736, and previous

(U) Classified by W. Lewis Amselem, Charge d'Affaires.
Reasons 1.5 (b, d).

[11.](#) (U) This message contains an Action Request --
Please see Para six.

[12.](#) (C) Summary: The first round of talks between the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil Tigers has ended on a positive note. Per a press statement issued by the Norwegian facilitators (see Para seven), the two sides have agreed to form two joint bodies: one to examine issues related to displaced person resettlement, and one to focus on stimulating assistance to the war-torn north and east of the country. The two sides have also agreed to meet three more times in coming months. Initial reaction from contacts reinforces our sense that this first round seems to have provided a positive basis for future discussions. A draft press statement contained in para six praising the outcome of the talks is for Department's review. End Summary.

[13.](#) (SBU) Talks between the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Thailand wrapped up on a positive note on September 18. As monitored on a live TV feed in Colombo, the concluding press conference highlighted what seemed to be positive atmospherics shared between both sides. GSL and LTTE delegation leaders bantered amiably with the press and interacted respectfully with each other. In terms of substance, the two sides basically used the press conference to reiterate the information contained in the Norwegian government press statement reviewed below.

[14.](#) (U) Based on the Norwegian government's press statement (contained in para seven), the two sides reached specific agreement on the following:

-- To form a "Joint Committee" to look into ways to enable displaced persons to return to their homes in the north and east. (Note: This body's main focus seems to be finding ways to ease the return of displaced persons to their homes located inside or near "High Security Zones," i.e., areas controlled by the Sri Lankan security forces in the north and east.)

-- To form a "Joint Task Force" to examine ways of stimulating increased humanitarian assistance to the war-torn north and east. One of the tasks of this body will be "stepping up humanitarian mine action."

-- To meet three more times in coming months on the following dates:

- October 31 - November 3
- December 2-5
- January 6-9, 2003

(Note: The press statement was not clear on what the venue of these upcoming talks would be.)

(Note: Despite earlier indications, the two sides apparently did not reach an agreement on forming a committee on Missing in Action issues.)

[15.](#) (C) Comment: Although there was no agreement on complicated and controversial substantive issues, initial reaction from contacts reinforces our sense that this first round seems to have provided a positive basis for future discussions. It is way too early to say for sure, but the GSL -- and the very capable Norwegian facilitators -- seem to have been successful in hooking the LTTE into a structured process. Such a process would allow the two sides to become enmeshed in discussions of substantive matters, including the modalities of a possible interim framework and final

settlement of the dispute. All that said, what is critical for the moment is that the talks seem to have added to the fast momentum of the peace process. End Comment.

16. (U) Action Request: Unless otherwise directed by Department, Mission plans to issue the following press statement tomorrow (September 19) praising the outcome of the talks:

Begin text:

The U.S. has carefully reviewed the press statement issued by the Norwegian government reviewing the results of the negotiations held between the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Thailand, September 16-18. We praise the commitment of both sides to sustain the ceasefire, move forward with the peace process, and work toward a final settlement of the conflict. In moving forward, it is positive that the two sides have agreed to a schedule of meetings in the coming months.

The U.S. also welcomes the decision of both sides to form joint bodies focused on the return of displaced persons to their homes, and improving the humanitarian situation in the north and east. The U.S. is committed to supporting these vital objectives. We note, for example, that the Quick Reaction Demining Force (QRDF) has been in place in Jaffna since April and is scheduled to continue its work until late October. The U.S. is also working with the Sri Lankan military on a military-to-military humanitarian demining program that would begin shortly after the QRDF's departure.

To conclude, we are hopeful that the negotiating process inaugurated by the two sides will lead to a permanent end to the conflict based on the principles of democracy and respect for human rights, while maintaining Sri Lanka's territorial integrity. As we have noted before, we sense that the conditions are favorable for a desirable outcome. We again salute the Norwegian government's able facilitation of the talks and the Thai government for hosting them.

End text.

End Action Request.

17. (U) The following is the text of the Norwegian government press statement issued in Colombo by the Sri Lankan Peace Secretariat on September 18:

Begin text:

The first round of formal peace talks between the Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was held in Sattahip, Thailand, between 16 and 18 September 2002. The negotiations were facilitated by the Royal Norwegian Government.

The parties agreed that in their determination to bring the peace process forward, they are responding to the overwhelming call of the peoples of Sri Lanka to bring an end to the ethnic conflict, and create the conditions for lasting peace, prosperity, and respect for human rights.

Both parties expressed their resolve to address the full range of issues pertaining to a lasting political settlement of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, fully realizing that this can best be achieved by pursuing a step-by-step approach to the negotiation process. This approach has proven successful in the establishment and implementation of the Ceasefire Agreement already in force since February. The parties recognized the need for sustaining the Ceasefire Agreement, with the continued assistance of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission, which the parties commended for its impartial conduct in the fulfillment of its important mandate.

The parties affirmed their determination to continue upholding the Ceasefire Agreement and expanding the range of confidence-building measures over the period ahead. Building on the achievements of the Ceasefire Agreement, the parties agreed to establish promptly a Joint Committee to deal with the issues relating to High Security Zones, with the aim of enabling the return of larger numbers of displaced persons to their areas of origin, thereby facilitating the restoration of normalcy. This Joint Committee will consist of senior representatives of both sides, including military personnel.

The parties discussed in depth the urgent need to address the difficult humanitarian situation in the north and east of Sri Lanka. To this effect, the parties

agreed to establish a Joint Task Force for Humanitarian and Reconstruction Activities. The Joint Task Force will constitute a partnership between the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE, and will have responsibility for the identification, financing and monitoring of urgent humanitarian and reconstruction activities in the north and east. The task force will operate with due participation of Muslims, and its work will benefit all ethnic communities of the North and East. The details relating to the mandate and structure of the Joint Task Force will rapidly be finalized between the parties with the assistance of the Norwegian facilitators. The two immediate priorities of the parties are (1) stepping up humanitarian mine action, and (2) accelerating resettlement and rehabilitation of internally displaced persons.

The parties expressed their gratitude for the extensive goodwill of the international community toward the peace process. They urged donors to provide immediate funding for humanitarian priorities. This will enhance public confidence in the peace process and thus contribute to the further progress in the quest for peace in Sri Lanka.

The parties agreed that the establishment of the Joint Task Force is a sign of the increasing level of trust between the parties, and of their willingness to work together towards the establishment of a provisional administrative structure for the north and east.

Recognizing that the way forward is a long and demanding one, the parties agreed to continuing rounds of negotiations. The next three rounds of negotiations will take place on the following dates:

31 October - 3 November 2002
2-5 December 2002
6-9 January 2003

The parties as well as the Norwegian facilitators reiterated their appreciation to the Royal Thai Government for their kindness in providing the venue for the negotiations as well as the generous hospitality shown to the delegations.
End text.

18. (U) Minimize considered.

AMSELEM